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SC UPHOLDS 28 PC GST ON ONLINE GAMING COMPANIES

The Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld the government's retrospective levy of 28 per cent GST on online gaming companies and observed that such imposition was constitutionally valid. A bench comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan said online gaming platforms are not mere intermediaries but are to be treated as suppliers amenable to the Goods and Service Tax (GST) regime on levies and taxes | **P15**

DKS MAY BE NEXT CM AS EARLY AS MAY 29 OR 31

Siddu likely to tender resignation today; CLP date yet to be confirmed

BALA CHAUHAN & DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @ Bengaluru

CM Siddaramaiah leaves Vidhana Soudha after paying tributes to former PM Jawaharlal Nehru on the latter's death anniversary on Wednesday | NAGARAJA GADEKAL

DEPUTY Chief Minister and Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee President Doddalahalli Kempegowda (DK) Shivakumar is likely to succeed Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who on Tuesday reportedly agreed to step down as CM on being asked to do so by the party high command, which also offered to move him to the Rajya Sabha to play a "larger role" at the national level — about which is not keen.

The Congress high command late Tuesday evening decided to appoint Shivakumar as the new Karnataka CM after All India Congress President (AICC) Mallikarjun Kharge reportedly turned down the offer to lead Karnataka, citing age and health issues, sources said.

While the Congress central leadership is keen on completing the power transfer process quickly and smoothly, no date has yet been fixed for the oath-taking ceremony of the new CM. However, the buzz is that it could happen as early as May 29 or May 31. Celebrations have already begun at Shivakumar's residence and in his assembly constituency, Kanakapura.

Siddaramaiah has called for a breakfast meeting with his cabinet colleagues on Thursday morning, and is likely to tender his resignation to Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot on Thursday afternoon. The date for convening the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meeting to elect the new CM and initiate the process of government formation will be finalized on Thursday, sources said.

Shivakumar, who returned to Bengaluru on Wednesday evening, spoke to his mentor, astrologer and spiritual guru Rajguru Bellur Sankaranarayanan Dwarakanath, popularly called "Guruji", and sought his blessings. Dwarakanath said Shivakumar, who spoke to him from Delhi on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning, "is waiting for a formal announcement from the Congress leadership on his appointment as the new CM".

Sources confirmed that Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who is also AICC General Secretary, backed Shivakumar's prospect as the new CM all through, to honour the halfway power-sharing agreement said to have been reached between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar post the Congress victory in the 2023 assembly polls, while keeping in mind the 2028 assembly elections. **P5**

CM to break silence today

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's sympathisers made a beeline to his official residence and insisted that he must not resign. Meanwhile, Siddaramaiah broke his silence only to say that he would speak on Thursday | **P4**

INSIDE» VIJAYENDRA PREDICTS MID-TERM POLLS IN K'TAKA | SATISH FRONTRUNNER TO LEAD STATE CONGRESS P4

SC gives stamp of approval to poll body's SIR

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld the power of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to conduct the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, noting that the poll body did not violate the Representation of People's (RP) Act by ordering the SIR in Bihar.

"The ECI has the authority to conduct the SIR exercise and did not transgress any statutory or constitutional provision," the bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said, adding it breathed life into the constitutional mandate to conduct fair and fair polls.

On the sensitive question of citizenship, the court said the ECI is empowered to conduct a limited scrutiny of citizenship status while preparing and revising electoral rolls.

But deletion of names do not amount to a determination of citizenship in the strict sense. "It affects the individual's entitlement to be included in the electoral roll, and thereby their right to participate in the electoral process. It does not, however, operate to divest the individual of claims of citizenship, nor does it foreclose a determination of that question by the Competent Authority under the Citizenship Act," the court said.

The bench went on to say that the SIR satisfies the requirements of proportionality. The measures adopted bear a rational nexus to the objective sought to be achieved, are not manifestly excessive, and are accompanied by sufficient safeguards against arbitrary exclusion, the bench said. As for deletions, the court said the ECI shall refer all such cases within four weeks to the competent authority under the Citizenship Act, 1955, for adjudication of citizenship. The competent authority shall take the call preferably before the next election after giving notice and an opportunity of hearing to the deleted individuals.

EXPRESS READ

Ugandan woman in B'luru tests -ve for Ebola

Bengaluru: The Ugandan woman, who was placed under isolation after exhibiting symptoms of Ebola infection, has tested negative to the deadly virus. The suspected Ebola case reported in Bengaluru has come out negative, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said in a post on X on Wednesday. Officials also urged citizens not to panic or spread misinformation regarding the case | **P3**

Govt invites bids for 5th-gen stealth fighter

New Delhi: The Union government on Wednesday invited bids for India's nearly Rs 15,000-crore Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) programme, with three shortlisted Indian firms and consortia set to compete for development of the country's first indigenous fifth-generation stealth fighter. The programme had received Cabinet Committee on Security approval in 2024 | **P11**

ED searches at Pinarayi's properties spark violence, officials injured

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ T'Puram

THE Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday raided two premises linked to CPM stalwart and Leader of Opposition Pinarayi Vijayan and eight other locations across the state, in connection with the Exalogic-CMRL pay-off case, sparking violent protests by agitated CPM workers, who smashed the vehciles in which the search party was returning after the raid in Thiruvanathapuram.

Besides the former CM's rented house in the state capital, the ED also raided his Kannur residence and the Kozhikode house of his son-in-law and ex-minister P A Mohammed Riyas as part of its money-laundering probe into the case linked to Pinarayi's daughter, Veena T, owner of the now-defunct Exalogic.

CPM workers attack a car carrying ED officials who searched Pinarayi Vijayan's house in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday | ALBIN MATHEW

The sweep triggered day-long tension and high drama in Thiruvananthapuram. CPM workers and leaders gathered outside Pinarayi's residence and staged a sit-in at the gate. Tensions escalated after protest marches by SFI activists and soon exploded into violence as ED officials concluded the raid and began leaving the premises after an eight-hour search. CPM workers sorrounded their convoy and pelted the vehicles with bricks and stones. Three cars were damaged, leaving ED officials and drivers injured.

Bank deposit details of Veena were found during the raid, an ED official said . **P7**

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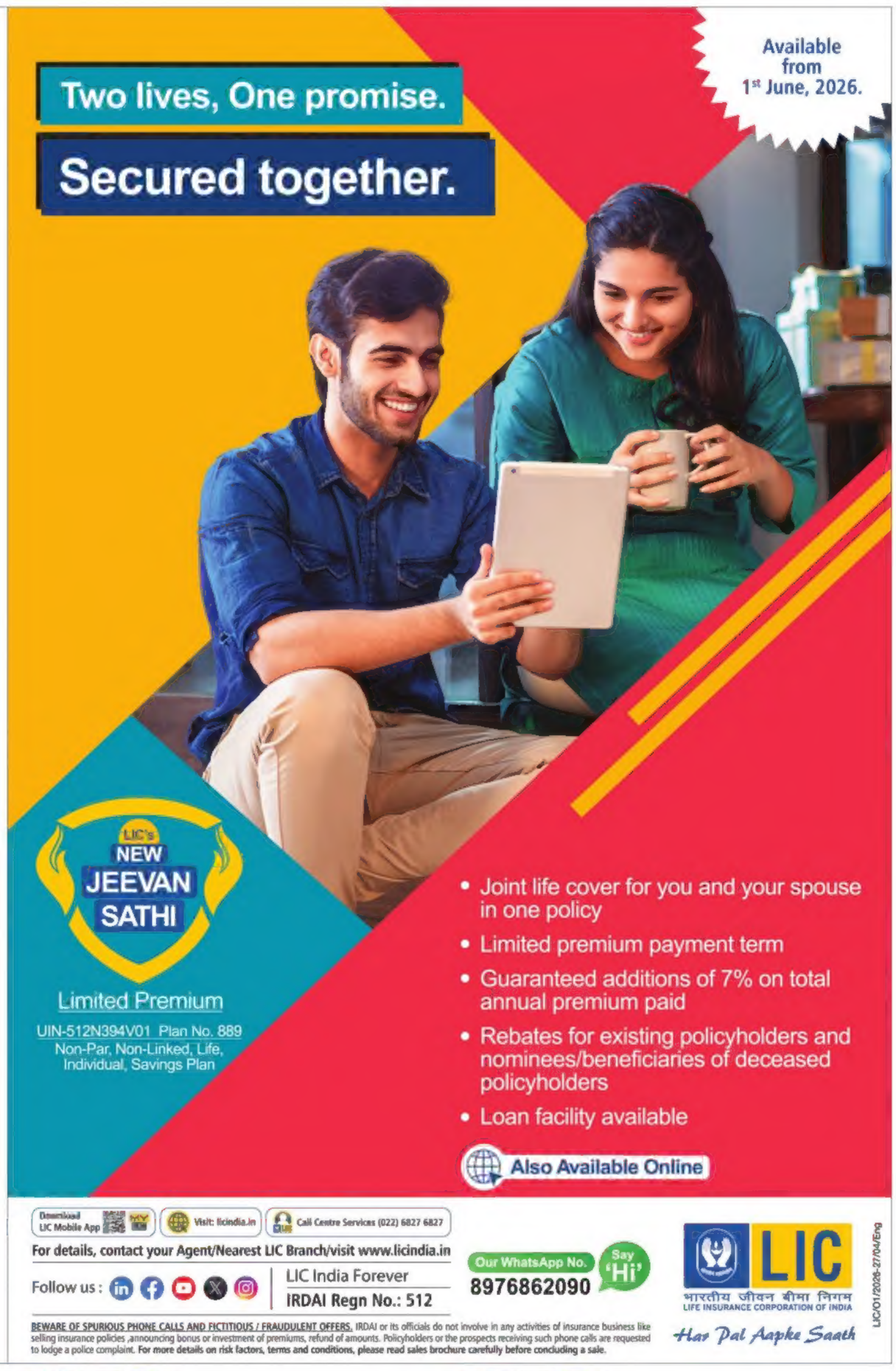
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